

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 051 543

EA 003 431

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TITLE Evaluation of Middle-Administrative Personnel: A Component of the Accountability Process.
PUB DATE 22 Feb 71
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at American Association of School Administrators Annual Convention (103rd, Atlantic City, New Jersey, February 20-24, 1971)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Personnel, *Administrator Evaluation, *Educational Accountability, Elementary Schools, *Evaluation Criteria, *Evaluation Methods, *Principals, Secondary Schools, Speeches

ABSTRACT

Evaluation systems inevitably reflect the values and aspirations of school districts. These values in turn may reflect either an orientation toward effective handling of the status quo or simply a posture of effective efforts to improve the status quo. Evaluation systems for elementary and secondary principals should be designed with the explicit objectives of stimulating leadership and encouraging improvement efforts. (Author)

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Evaluation of Middle-Administrative Personnel: A Component of
The Accountability Process

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Annual Convention
of the
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Atlantic City, New Jersey

February 22, 1971

ED051543

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Evaluation of Middle-Administrative Personnel: A Component of The Accountability Process

Many of you I am sure read the recent announcement that Educational Testing Service has agreed to help the New York City schools develop an accountability system. Henry Dyer of ETS in commenting on this development noted that it was more difficult to design and implement an effective accountability system for a large school system than it was to put a man on the moon. It is notable that the effort in New York will not seek to relate accountability to the actions of any one group in the system such as teachers or principals, for example. This makes for a relatively easier task. If an evaluation and accountability system for a specific group such as administrators were the task, it would be much more difficult both from a political and research viewpoint. One could say that if the development of an accountability system concerned simply with output measures is as difficult as putting a man on the moon, then the development of evaluative and accountability systems which will relate administrators input to school output is as great a challenge as putting a man on Mars! At the same time I am sure you will agree that the subject under discussion today is not one that can be avoided by educators.

In discussing the term "middle-administrative personnel" with colleagues, I discovered the expected, namely, that the term has different meanings to different persons. For purposes of the present discussion the term will refer to school principals, both elementary and secondary. However, much of what is said should have implications for other administrators. In dealing with the definition of the much used term "accountability" I shall rely upon Webster who defines accountable as "answerable to" or "capable of giving a reckoning." Thus, in somewhat over-simplified terms school districts having a system for evaluating principals must have capacities for getting answered a few basic questions:

What should principals do and why? What measures can be used to judge how effective principals are in doing what they should do? In fact, how effective are they in doing what they should do? Clearly, evaluation has to be concerned with all of the above questions and specifically with the latter one. A major output of an evaluation system should be information necessary to judge principal effectiveness and, in turn, to give an account to different publics concerning school objectives and results.

So much for some initial definitions. Now let me turn to some of the significant conditions bearing upon the development and implementation of systems for evaluating and helping principals to be accountable. Put differently, what are some of the factors which need to be considered by those developing evaluation systems for school principals.

First, it seems clear that increasing numbers of groups of individuals are pressing for more systematic ways for evaluating principals and for holding schools accountable. School superintendents and central office administrators are increasingly concerned about establishing more effective modes for evaluating heads of schools; teachers, students, parents, and representatives of differing community groups and organizations are also pressing principals to account for school decisions and outcomes. Such pressures represent a new and growing demand for more systematic middle-management evaluation in education.

A second and related condition is that principals increasingly are called upon by students, teachers, citizens, and others to account for school results and actions. As heads of schools, principals make decisions affecting the role and status of teachers and they must be able to account to teachers for these decisions. Since principals, especially at the high school level, are increasingly confronted about questions of purpose, policy, and procedure by students, they must be able to give a reckoning to this group. As parents and citizens, more frequently than in the past, pose searching questions about the

operation and effectiveness of specific schools, principals are pressed to explain what the schools are doing, why they are doing it, and how well they are doing it. As principals respond to demands for accountability, they are inevitably evaluated, at least implicitly, by different groups. This poses a question about how informal evaluations should be related to formal evaluation systems in school districts.

Third, it is assumed that the current trends toward school decentralization will continue and that these trends will have significance for evaluation and accountability systems for principals. As decentralization tendencies evolve, school systems will need to establish goals and guidelines which will encourage leadership and initiative in all attendance units; however, the specific objectives of differing attendance units will necessarily vary because the learning needs of students in different schools will differ, the cultural traditions of attendance units in different areas will be dissimilar, the parent aspirations and concerns in different neighborhoods will be diverse, and so forth. Because of differences such as those just noted, standard forms for evaluating principals will no longer be entirely sufficient for school systems interested in advancing school leadership and more effective accountability systems. More specifically, since the learning objectives will differ from school to school and at different times in the same school, sets of criteria for evaluating principals in different schools and at different times will necessarily differ. Thus, evaluation systems will need to help individual schools, which have differing objectives, be accountable to their immediate clientele and the specific neighborhoods served. This means that principals themselves will need to play an important role in developing evaluation systems.

Fourth, it seems clear that evaluation systems can be shaped by diverse values and emphases even at the attendance unit level. For example, there are generally two

interrelated but distinguishable areas of accountability. One area has to do more with the principal's role in helping set sound school objectives and in determining priorities among objectives. The other has to do more with the attainment of defined and established school objectives. Since purpose setting and priority determination involves political processes, coping with conflict, and the making of value judgments, leadership is inevitably required in this area of accountability. The essential questions to be addressed by those involved in this area are "what should a given school do and why?" An evaluation system for principals must obtain data on their role in helping groups address and resolve satisfactorily questions of purpose setting and priority determination. Traditionally, schools have given considerable attention to purpose setting. They have given much less attention to priority determination. Future evaluation systems for principals will need to give more attention to evaluation in this area.

The second area of accountability is concerned more with effective goal attainment. Evaluation systems in this area have to produce information that will enable principals and other administrators to give an account of the extent to which established school objectives are in fact being achieved and the extent to which and manner in which principals are contributing to the attainment of school objectives. Principals may exercise leadership in effective goal attainment by helping implement program innovations designed to achieve defined objectives more effectively or they can display management and support skills in the implementation of existing educational policies and programs. Central questions to be answered through an evaluation system in this area are: "To what extent are established school objectives being achieved and in what ways and to what extent are principals contributing to the attainment of objectives?"

Leaders in school systems must decide at given times if the two areas of accountability are equally significant or if one deserves more emphasis than the other. Since there is widespread need today to clarify school objectives and to relate these to data specific to attendance units, school system guidelines may very well seek systems of evaluation that encourage principals to direct major attention to purpose defining and priority determination. If purpose and priority setting have already been dealt with effectively in a school system, the evaluation system may be directed more toward evaluating principal performance in relation to goal attainment.

Fifth, it is clear that there are differing bases for evaluating principal effectiveness and accountability. One is whether or not principals can give clear and effective oral accounts in specific situations concerning accountability questions. Can they, for example, speak clearly and with evidence concerning the objectives and underlying rationale of the schools they head or on the extent to which school objectives are being achieved? Measures of effectiveness in this case will relate to the content and quality of the principal's communication. Data for this type of evaluation may be obtained from private interviews or from observations of principal behavior under conditions where he is expected to give an account, publicly, on school objectives and/or progress. Such a base for evaluation is in some ways limited. However, the leadership behavior involved in this approach is becoming increasingly important at the principalship level. In addition, many school systems do not have ways of evaluating principals in this important area even though citizens are pressing for greater clarity in school purpose and for more evidence concerning school effectiveness.

Another base for evaluating principals is actual performance over time related to specified objectives. Given the assumption that a school needs to update and re-define

its purposes, for example, does the principal in a specified time period lead teachers, students, and community personnel to a consensus concerning desired school objectives? Or, given the decision that an innovation (e.g., individually prescribed instruction) needs to be implemented does the school in fact implement the innovation and is the principal perceived as an effective supporter, facilitator, and leader in the effort?

Finally, there are bases for evaluating how principal's behavior is perceived to be related to gains or regressions in pupil performance. Such bases relate to the more ultimate objectives of the school. It is difficult to assess precisely the relationship between principal performance and student performance. However, inferences can be made about these relationships; further, teachers and administrators can certainly define ways and suggest principal actions indirectly related to improved pupil performance. Measures of these actions can shed light on the degree to which and manner in which principals provide support and assistance to achieve defined pupil performance objectives. The following sample guidelines, taken from the Grand Rapids Public Schools form for evaluating the performance of secondary school principals, is illustrative:

1. Promotes a school environment conducive to good learning and productive innovation.
2. Procures and provides for effective use of instructional materials, equipment, and supplies.
3. Plans and encourages meaningful inservice growth.

Sixth, the scientific bases of education, management, and leadership are insufficient to ensure infallible evaluative judgments about principal effectiveness. To be sure there are those who postulate a theoretical capability for evaluating the impact that principals have upon pupil performance. Stephen Barro, for example, made the following observation

in an interesting article published in the December, 1970 issue of the Phi Delta Kappan.¹

"....school administrators can be held accountable for relative levels of pupil performance in their schools to the extent that the outcomes are not attributable to pupil, teacher or classroom characteristics and school variables that they cannot control. The question is, having adjusted for differences in pupil and teacher inputs and having taken account of other characteristics of the schools, are there unexplained differences among schools that can be attributed to differences in the quality of school leadership and administration?"

The logic of Barro's position is very persuasive. Practically, however, education has not yet achieved sufficiently powerful research designs and methodologies to determine the direct and precise effects of administrative behavior on pupil performance. Given such a circumstance, it would seem necessary to rely upon more intermediate criteria for evaluating principals, including indirect measures of the principal's contributions to desired pupil performance. Since evaluation systems for principals cannot be based upon absolute criteria, they must remain open both to new evidence on performance and to adjustments in evaluative judgments.

We can conclude, then, that a number of conditions need to be considered by those interested in implementing new or in improving existing systems of evaluation for principals. These conditions may be summarized briefly as follows:

1. There is a growing and visible press on the part of various publics for better systems of evaluation and accountability for school principals.
2. A variety of groups and individuals are examining the purposes and process of schools and are visibly engaged in the informal evaluation of school principals.

¹Stephen Barro. "An Approach to Developing Accountability Measures for the Public Schools" Phi Delta Kappan, December, 1970, p. 200.

3. There is growing interest in and trends toward school decentralization.

4. Evaluation systems reflect the values and purposes of school systems; they may, for example, encourage purpose setting, priority determination, program innovations, and other leadership behaviors on the part of principals or they may give greater emphasis to the effective administration of schools within a framework of existing policies, programs, and resources.

5. There are different bases for evaluation and accountability systems for principals; verbal efforts in specific situations to account for the whats, whys, how wells, and the wherefores of a given school; the extent to which a given priority objective established by a school is achieved over specified time periods; and the ways in which principals indirectly contribute or do not contribute to effective pupil progress generally.

6. The science of education, management, and leadership is not sufficiently developed to ensure infallible systems of evaluation.

Clearly, there are important action implications which stem from the conditions just noted. Some of the conditions, such as growing public interest in accountability, encourage the development of evaluation systems. Other conditions, such as inadequate knowledge of education and leadership, constrain the development of effective evaluation systems. Among the action implications of interest to those involved in implementing evaluation systems are the following:

(1) If more effective formal evaluation and accountability systems for principals are to be achieved, school superintendents and central office personnel will need to take the lead in bringing about the establishment of these systems.

(2) Evaluation and accountability systems, if they are to be responsible to public interests, will need to be supported by plans for communication systems which effectively link school and community personnel.

(3) School systems instituting evaluation and accountability systems in a climate of growing citizen interest will need to be prepared to reveal both the positive and negative aspects of school achievement.

(4) An important task of school system leaders is that of defining the general role of school principals in ways that will encourage initiative and leadership.

(5) Principals will need to take a greater leadership role in helping get formulated objectives which are unique to given schools; these objectives will need to be based in part upon data specific to given school populations and attendance areas.

(6) Representative students, teachers, and parents should be encouraged by principals to participate in the setting of school objectives.

(7) The central office of school systems will need to place less emphasis upon standardized evaluation forms and more emphasis upon evaluation that is adapted to the unique objectives of individual schools.

(8) Principals will need to have a significant role in specifying the criteria for evaluating achievements in the schools they head; they will also need to involve staffs in establishing the measures by which school achievement will be evaluated.

(9) Systems for evaluating principals should be open to new evidence and to a re-evaluation of existing evidence under circumstances where principals believe evaluative judgments are inadequate or unjust.

In sum, then, we have outlined a number of significant conditions bearing upon principal evaluation and accountability and have deduced certain guidelines from these conditions which are designed to be pertinent to school districts interested in establishing evaluation systems for middle managers. The argument throughout is that evaluation systems

inevitably reflect the values and aspirations of school districts. These values may reflect much more of an orientation toward effective handling of the status quo or they may reflect a posture of effective efforts to improve the status quo. We strongly believe that evaluation systems for principals should be designed with the explicit objective of stimulating leadership and improvement efforts.
